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Special Education Paraeducators Memorial School, East Hampton, CT

**Education Committee
March 15, 2023**

**HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes
Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee. We are a team of paraeducators, many of whom are residents of the town of East Hampton and/or surrounding towns. We work as special education paraeducators in the East Hampton School District at Memorial School. We offer the following testimony in support of **HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators**

Upon hearing about this important Education Committee Public Hearing concerning Paraeducator Legislation, we sat down together to collaborate on our feelings and needs. Our love for children has brought us into this career and ideally we all would like to remain in the field, but sadly for many, the miniscule pay, poor healthcare benefits, and retirement plans don't make it realistic. For many, being a paraeducator is a mere stepping stone to other jobs that offer better pay, healthcare and retirement plans.

First and foremost, paraeducators are not compensated well enough. The majority of us could get the same pay working at entry level in a big box store. What's worse is that many of us hold college degrees and yet as a paraeducator it's not recognized or compensated. The cost of living and the current wage for a paraeducator is not in balance; and therefore, would greatly benefit from a yearly

wage that is updated to today's economic and market conditions. Personally speaking, some of us either rely on our spouse's income, or those who are single have multiple jobs in order to get by. In our school district, substitute teachers are compensated more yet we paraeducators have more responsibilities and tasks to complete throughout the school day.

Paraeducators are also not fairly taken care of when it comes to health insurance. Current healthcare is not affordable. It takes away a huge percentage of our pay; not to mention, it is completely unrealistic for anyone to have their family on the current healthcare offered to paraeducators. Again, the majority rely on our spouse's healthcare options instead. Retirement plans are also sub par. We, like any other working American, deserve to benefit from a defined pension plan that would enable us to afford to retire with dignity when the time comes.

Although being a paraeducator is a rewarding experience and many of us love our jobs, how we are taken care of for the job we do is disheartening and why many choose to move on. It is not at all surprising there are over 1,300 paraeducator vacancies. Paraeducators are greatly underpaid and benefits including healthcare and retirement plans are sub par. Many of us feel underappreciated by upper management for the jobs we perform on a daily basis. If we didn't enjoy working and touching the hearts of the students, many of us wouldn't be doing the job we do.

Paraeducators are the reason why classrooms run smoothly and they are an indispensable part of any educational environment. The repercussions of not taking care of paraeducators is that the students ultimately suffer. With these vacancies come children's service hours not being met. As paraeducators we feel underappreciated and as parents (some of us) it angers us to know the children ultimately suffer the most. It's time paraeducators and our young learners are adequately looked out for.

As part of the Memorial team and employees for the town of East Hampton, we feel like we're the lowest on the totem pole. Our outlook is that management feels we are easily dispensable and we aren't valued for the job we do.

Paraeducators and the importance of their roles in the school setting has been overlooked for far too long. The result of paraeducators not being taken care of is young learners in turn not getting the attention they need and deserve. Our young learners deserve to learn in an environment that runs smoothly, to have their services met each day. This can't be achieved if all staff in the school aren't properly compensated for the jobs they perform. It's time to stand up for the little guy and reward them for the invaluable (but often overlooked) job they perform.

Now is the time for this committee and all the members of the General Assembly to take immediate and meaningful action to increase paraeducator pay, lower our healthcare costs, and ensure we have meaningful retirement benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Please support student learning by prioritizing paraeducators and passing HB 6881.

Sincerely,

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